

I am writing in support of HB 5140, An Act Concerning the Use of Therapy Animals to Comfort Children Testifying in Certain Criminal Prosecutions.

I am a Board Certified Pediatrician licensed in the State of Connecticut. I am also an Associate Member of Tails of Joy, a network of volunteers committed to providing therapeutic benefit through the use of animals to people who need comfort of company.

As a Pediatrician who has practiced for over twenty-five years, I am well aware of the emotional trauma that children suffer through abuse or violence. Children have less developed adaptive resources than adults to deal with these events. They often are fearful and disclose their occurrence only reluctantly to family members, therapists or other adults with whom they have developed sufficient trust. The courtroom setting is full of strangers, authority figures, and a defendant just a few feet away. They are being asked detailed questions about events that are painful to discuss and their veracity may be challenged.

The presence of a therapy animal and trained handler has been shown to do much to calm and soothe children and help them feel safe after exposure to these traumatic stresses. In some instances, it has made the difference between a jury hearing the child's testimony and needing to proceed without it. It can help decrease the negative aspects of the experience for the child, and diminish the possibility of retraumatization. For these reasons, over half the states in our country allow therapy dogs in their courtrooms. I am hoping that Connecticut will soon become one of them.

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